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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SISTANI FEARS PROVINCIAL COUNCIL VALIDITY IN
JEOPARDY WITHOUT ELECTIONS

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4(a) and (d)

[11](#). (S/NF) Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani worries provincial councils will lack legal standing without new elections by end 2008, Senior Advisor Gordon Gray learned in a UNAMI read-out of SRSG De Mistura's September 6 meeting with the Najaf-based cleric. DSRSG Andrew Gilmour (protect), joined by the UN interpreter who was present at the Najaf encounter, told Gray and Deputy Political Counselor on September 10 that Sistani wanted provincial elections to happen soon and under an open list system. Sistani did not favor using the 2005 elections law, which stipulated closed party lists, because that would lead to lower voter turn-out. Gilmour mentioned that Sistani had probed de Mistura for background on party positions in Baghdad with respect to the draft provincial elections law. Gilmour found these apparent holes in Sistani's knowledge of the Iraqi political landscape peculiar, since UNAMI otherwise deemed the Ayatollah well-informed, singling out his grasp of economic and international affairs in particular.

[12](#). (S/NF) Asked how Sistani viewed his encounters with De Mistura, the UN interpreter replied that the Grand Ayatollah clearly anticipated greater UNAMI engagement. Gilmour chimed in that Sistani seemed to expect UNAMI leadership along the lines of the 2005 elections, but with the evolution and deepening of Iraqi capacity, UNAMI's role inevitably had had to alter. During a meeting three months ago, Sistani had raised human rights and humanitarian concerns and urged UNAMI to be more vocal. Gilmour suggested that Sistani's abiding respect for the first UN envoy, Sergio de Mello, continued to inform the relationship with UNAMI. He suggested that Sistani moreover was not immune to the stature accruing to him from receiving the SRSG in Najaf.

[13](#). (S/NF) With respect to SOFA negotiations, the Grand Ayatollah reportedly offered no specific remarks but commented that Iraqi sovereignty must always be respected.

CROCKER